

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION APPROACH FOR ROAD MAINTENANCE IN UGANDA

by

J. Leyland^{*}, B. Tumwebaze^{**} and M. Lubega-Kagere^{***}

ABSTRACT

Technology is application of knowledge and skills practically. Road users and roadside communities have a great deal of knowledge about their roads. They know where the accident spots are, where there are drainage problems, where construction materials are and they know about the use of the road. Those responsible for road maintenance such as the staff of the Ministry of Works, Housing and Communication (MoWHC) in Uganda have the technical knowledge but probably not in-depth local knowledge about the roads.

When the Western Uganda Road Maintenance Capacity Building Project (WURMCBP) started in 1996 funded by the governments of Britain and Uganda, it recognised the importance of roadside communities and road users as players and stakeholders in the road maintenance system. Following extensive consultations at the project's outset, it was decided to establish road committees at sub-county level as a point of contact between the MoWHC and the local roadside communities and as a mechanism to involve local communities in the road improvement process. Workshops were held by the project/MoWHC staff to sensitise the road committees on road maintenance issues and site visits were conducted with road committee members along the gravel trunk roads identified for improvement, both before and after the improvement works were done. On average there is one sub-county for every 15km section of the trunk roads in western Uganda. The improved communications and response from all involved was so positive that the MoWHC decided to adopt the approach countrywide in 1999 for the national (and district) road network. The project assisted the MoWHC to do this by training MoWHC staff in communications and facilitation skills so that the Ministry staff could develop a good, positive two-way relationship with the road committees. In western Uganda, the MoWHC has conducted workshops and site visits with nearly 70 sub-counties in six districts and the campaign is ongoing country wide for the national road network. Through the road committee approach, local communities are better informed of works on the roads and, recognising their stake in the road network, they are keen to monitor road maintenance activities and facilitate works where necessary. The approach is seen by the MoWHC as can effective involvement of roadside communities in the road maintenance system and improve it. The paper details the approach, the benefits and the lessons learnt to date.

^{*} Community Participation Specialist, Western Uganda Road Maintenance Capacity Building Project

^{**} Community Roads Officer, Western Uganda Road Maintenance Capacity Building Project

^{***} Assistant Project Co-ordinator, Ministry of Works, Housing and Communications, Uganda

1. INTRODUCTION

If you increase your knowledge of a topic or situation, you gain a better understanding and appreciation of it. The greater understanding enables you to make more informed decisions regarding that topic or situation. In the case of road maintenance, it is beneficial for those concerned to increase their knowledge of maintenance of the roads.

Road users and roadside residents are as much concerned with the state of the roads as those who are responsible for maintaining them. In Uganda, the Ministry of Works, Housing and Communications (MoWHC) has responsibility for the maintenance of the national trunk road network besides being responsible for overall policy on the roads. The District Engineers and their staff in the MoWHC maintenance stations have the technical knowledge about the roads in terms of their design, construction and maintenance. However, they may not have the local knowledge on specific sections along the road, the accident spots, drainage problems and usage. This knowledge is held by the road users and local communities living along the roads who in turn may not know much about the technical aspects of road design and maintenance.

By sharing knowledge of the roads between communities and road agency officials and involve communities in road maintenance activities, the MoWHC can gain better local knowledge of the roads and thereby improve the maintenance service that they provide. Similarly, the local communities can gain a better understanding of road maintenance issues and an appreciation of the Ministry's work on the roads and be more prepared to support the MoWHC in the maintenance of the roads. Increasing these two stakeholders' knowledge of the roads can improve the maintenance of the road network which is what the Western Uganda Road Maintenance Capacity Building Project (WURMCBP) sought to do by establishing and working with 'road committees'.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE WESTERN UGANDA ROAD MAINTENANCE CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

The Project is a technical capacity building project that supports the Ministry of Works, Housing and Communications in the rehabilitation and routine maintenance of selected gravel roads in western Uganda. The project covers sections of gravel roads totalling about 1,000 km that are the responsibility of MoWHC Maintenance Stations in Fort Portal, Hoima, Masindi and Mubende. These maintenance stations cover most of Masindi, Hoima, Kibaale, Mubende, Kabarole and Bundibugyo districts. The project aims to strengthen the capacity of local firms of contractors to undertake periodic and routine maintenance and support the transfer from public to private sector execution of maintenance works.

The project has duration of 5 years, funded jointly by governments of Britain and Uganda. The first implementation phase started mid-November 1996 and the second one started in April 1999. The project will finish at the end of 2001 by which time it will have funded the rehabilitation of 675km of the gravel main roads. The project aims to improve road access in Western Uganda to the benefit of the local and

national economies, and to the poor people in the project area. It is expected to provide improved access to, services and markets, reduce transport costs and provide new employment opportunities for both men and women. It has a community participation/social development component that aims to facilitate community involvement in the road maintenance and rehabilitation contracts and to provide employment to poorer people in the project area. Local communities are very important stakeholders in road upkeep and the project's community participation activities aim to recognise and reinforce that. The two main elements of the community participation component focus firstly on community involvement in road maintenance and secondly, on promoting road safety by road users. The community participation component works in a participatory manner with existing institutions, both local and national, so as to help to build their capacity and increase the chances of the activities being sustained beyond the life span of the project. The activities are supported by a part-time community participation specialist, a full-time community roads officer and a part-time road safety officer. As the programme has expanded, two more part-time officers have been taken on. The following section outlines the development of the road committee approach and the factors that influenced its direction.

3. DEVELOPING THE ROAD COMMITTEE APPROACH

Prior to the project, the MoWHC used to carry out periodic maintenance work on the roads with no participation from local residents and representatives. The roads were viewed as being the property of central government both by the Ministry and by the local communities. Theft of road furniture e.g. signs, scour checks and other materials was common. Misuse of roads such as blocking side drains etc was also common. Local communities were only involved in the recruitment of labour-based routine maintenance contractors to carry out the annual routine maintenance of 2km or longer stretches of the roads.

During the Inception Phase a participatory assessment of community views on road improvement and maintenance requirements was carried out, followed by a workshop, to help determine how best to involve local communities, primarily in the rehabilitation works planned for selected gravel roads. It was agreed to form 'road committees' at sub-county level. Within the Ugandan local government strata, there are Local Councils (LC) at village level (LC1), parish level (LC2), sub-county level (LC3), county level (LC4) and district level (LC5). The sub-counties are second to the districts in terms of political and economic importance, being able to retain 65% of their tax revenue for use within the sub-county. A road length of 30km may pass through 2 or 3 sub-counties. The sub-counties seemed to be the most appropriate level at which the MoWHC should establish these local relations. At the district level, leaders have access to contract documents and can call on the MoWHC District Engineers for consultation but such information has not been available at sub-county level. Thus it was an important level at which to improve communications and relations between the MoWHC and the local authorities and communities.

The sub-counties already had 'works committees' but at the time the project started, these were not active and only had about 5-8 appointed members. Whilst having the technical and institutional mandate, they were not viewed as being sufficiently

effective to be the point of liaison between the MoWHC and local communities in terms of generating community participation in road maintenance. Instead, it was agreed by local authority officials and others that sub-county 'road committees' should be formed to be the point of liaison between the MoWHC and the local communities.

Having determined the level at which liaison between the MoWHC and local communities should take place, the next step was to integrate the local communities' participation into the process of rehabilitating roads. The project identified activities which would be seen by the main actors; the MoWHC, the local communities and the contractors as being helpful to the process whilst at the same time not being too burdensome in terms of time and finance. Such an approach would have a greater chance of sustainability and replicability if it both utilised existing institutional structures and procedures and it minimised on resource requirements.

It was originally anticipated that the road committees would only exist during the period of the road rehabilitation contracts. However, both the road committee members and the MoWHC staff were very keen to maintain the road committees as a way of continuing the improved communications and relations between the two. The following section outlines the composition, roles and activities of the road committees. At the start of implementation phase, guidelines were drawn up for the composition of the committees, the sequence of activities to be carried out by them and the proposed roles of the committees. This enabled a uniform and systematic approach to be adopted that could be revised as early lessons were incorporated.

Initially, the project staff particularly the Community Roads Officer took the lead in initiating the establishment of the road committees and organising the activities with them. Whilst some of the District Engineers were keen to see greater cooperation with local communities, others were sceptical of involving local communities in road maintenance and were reluctant to spend time on road committee activities. However, as the activities started they all began to see the benefits and positive effects of working with road committees and gradually adopted the approach. In the second implementation phase of the project that started in 1999, District Engineers took the lead in organising activities and the project provided some for workshops and site visits costs. Now, the road committee activities are both organised and resourced by the MoWHC.

4. COMPOSITION, ROLES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE ROAD COMMITTEES

4.1 Membership

The membership of the 'road committees' mainly comprise locally elected or/and appointed officials. The membership includes:

- LC3 chairperson (chairperson)
- Sub-County Chief
- LC3 Secretary of Works
- All LC1 and LC2 chairpersons of all villages along the trunk (and district) roads in that sub-county
- Two women representatives (LC2 level)

- One youth representative
- Transporters' representative
- Other relevant officials e.g. Community Development Officer, Game warden if road passes through reserve etc.

The LC3 chairperson is the chair of the committee and someone from the committee members is appointed as secretary. Generally, the road committee size is about 25 members. Being composed primarily of elected officials it is easy for the LC3 chairperson to form the committee and to advise of meetings etc. The LC3 chairperson is also the most influential person in the sub-county in terms of effecting community mobilisation and participation.

4.2 Roles of the Road Committees

With the assistance of the District Engineers and the Road staff, the road committees may undertake the following activities in regard to maintenance and rehabilitation of the national roads:

1. Sensitise the community on the benefits of a good road and some of the requirements for a good road design including the need for proper drainage.
2. Inform roadside residents of proposed road works.
3. Inform roadside residents on the road reserve and the Government's rights on road reserve.
4. Provide advice to MoWHC staff e.g. on road safety issues near schools and markets, at accident spots and water crossing locations on the road. This information is important for road improvement design.
5. Facilitate road safety training at schools/other venues after the road has been improved.
6. Provide a focal contact point so that the MoWHC can keep the local community informed on what is happening and vice versa.
7. Help to advertise job availability on the roads and dates of recruitment/meetings.
8. Assist in informing the community on the availability of labour-based maintenance contracts.
9. Help to conduct sensitisation amongst the community to encourage people, particularly women, to come forward for work on the roads.
10. Accompany the MoWHC staff on a pre-works inspection of the road, in order that the community is informed and aware of the scope of works and requirements of the contractor and discuss issues arising at the start.
11. Accompany MoWHC staff on a final inspection of the road works so that the community is clear that the work has been satisfactorily completed and any outstanding issues can be raised.

4.3 Activities Carried Out with the Road Committees

An initial meeting is held with the LC3 chairperson and/or Sub-County Chief in which the District Engineer or his staff introduce the approach and discuss the proposed roles and activities of the road committee. If the road passing through the sub-county is about to be improved significantly, then the sub-county is approached prior to the works being started.

The LCIII chairperson is asked to form the committee and the MoWHC station organises a one day workshop for the committee members. During the workshop,

participants discuss in detail their role and relationship with the MoWHC, the contractor and their community members. The MoWHC briefs on technical aspects related to road maintenance especially drainage, road reserves and access to borrow pits. They are also informed as to the scope of works planned and the prospects for employment of local people during the works. Wherever possible the contractor also participates in the workshop.

In the case where road improvements are being carried out, an initial site visit along the road is then coordinated by the MoWHC. About seven representatives from each of the different sub-counties along the road are invited as well as the contractor. The site visits give a chance for all to discuss any potential problems particularly drainage issues, accident black spots, cattle crossings, location of school children crossing signs etc. Local officials also help to identify short sections of the road where there are many pedestrians (e.g. school children) and where it would be appropriate to construct or improve a footpath for them.

The road committees can then assist the contractor in identifying borrow pits, accommodation etc, and with advertising and recruitment of potential casual workers. Once the works are completed, the MoWHC conducts a final site visit with the road committees along the road. The MoWHC has a chance to describe and show the road improvements undertaken. Any outstanding issues or problems are also identified and discussed.

The MoWHC stations organise other meetings through the road committees, such as sensitisation workshops on the routine maintenance labour-based contracts that are available annually. The District Engineers have been keen to recruit more women contractors as they are generally regarded as better performers than men. Also, when the road rehabilitation contracts are being done using labour-based methods, then there is much more contact with the road committees and LC1s in the mobilisation of labour, and in encouraging women to apply for the work.

The following table overleaf indicates the number of road committees formed and the activities undertaken by them up to until the end of 2000.

Table 1: Road Committees in Western Uganda and activities carried out 1997-2000

MoWHC Station	Road network length/(km)	No. of sub-counties	No. of road committees established	No. of workshops held with road committees	No. of site visits conducted
Fort Portal (Kabarole & Bundibugyo Districts)	390	30	28	27	13
Hoima (Hoima and part of Kibaale Districts)	371	27	25	16	9
Masindi (Masindi District)	320	13	13	19	13
Mubende Mubende and part of Kibaale Districts)	188	17	16	7	4
Total (Western Region)	1,269	87	82	69	39

Source: MoWHC reports and WURMCBP reports

Besides the MoWHC stations' work with the road committees, the WURMCBP staff have been recently organising impact assessment workshops with the road committees along the improved roads. Because of the good relationship established with the road committees, it has been easy to work with them to collect detailed socio-economic impact data and to hold workshops with them. Together, the project and the sub-counties are able to review the changes on the road and in the sub-county that are in part a result of the road improvement. They have also analysed the distribution of benefits and identified some measures to increase people's access to benefits from the improved road.

5. BENEFITS OF THE ROAD COMMITTEE APPROACH

All the parties to the Road Committee approach; the MoWHC, the local communities and officials and the contractors all consider that the approach has provided valuable benefits and they are keen that the approach should be continued and applied more widely.

In terms of sharing knowledge, the local community representatives have gained knowledge on technical road maintenance aspects such as the features of a good road, drainage, road safety, road reserves, borrow pits etc. Such knowledge enables them, for instance, to appreciate the importance of good drainage and to ensure roadside communities do not block road drainage when they construct accesses to the road.

The road committees have also come to realise the importance of the road reserve and the Government's rights to it. In turn they caution their residents not to build within the road reserve or carry out any other development activity within it. They are also more aware of their rights to compensation in the case of gravel excavation and access to borrow pits and can help to deal with landowners who ask for exorbitant compensation from contractors.

The sub-counties are now more aware of the work of the MoWHC and what work is scheduled to take place as well as the employment opportunities for local people. They are also more understanding of the constraints of the MoWHC and appreciate that the District Engineers' work is limited by the equipment and resources at their disposal. It leads to more realistic expectations and less dissatisfaction with the MoWHC's work and makes work easier for the District Engineers and their staff.

As members of the road committees, and having greater knowledge of road maintenance issues, the local sub-county officials feel more able and willing to approach the District Engineer with their concerns or comments. Whilst the District Engineers are encouraging them to do so, the activities with the road committees also instil a sense of status in the members so that they feel more respected if they are to approach the MoWHC with their laymen's concerns. They are, and are better treated as, stakeholders in the road network. There is now much more trust and mutual respect between the MoWHC and the local community representatives.

Through the Road Committee approach, the communities are now aware that "the roads belong to them" and that they need to take responsibility for their protection and upkeep. They are tax payers and it is their money that the Ministry is using. The road committees are keen to closely monitor road maintenance work and to ensure that value for money is obtained from contractors assigned work on the road. Thus, they want to help contractors locate the best sources of gravel, other materials or water and to prevent misuse or theft of resources such as fuel and other materials by contractor's workers or local residents. In a number of cases, contractors have been notified of employees who have been illicitly selling the contractor's fuel, and stolen materials and road signs have been recovered by road committees. With improved formal contact with the contractor, they readily assist the contractor to identify suitable storage facilities for equipment and materials and to recruit disciplined labour.

The site visits hosted by the MoWHC and undertaken with road committees' members and the contractor before and after the road improvement contracts have been particularly useful. During these visits, road committees have been able to advocate and achieve some adjustments to contracts in line with local needs. For instance, communities have identified sections of the road where footpath improvements should be done. They have been instrumental in the project increasing funding for road contracts through variation orders especially on culverts, gravelling works and road signs as well as making design alterations such as including a parking bay at a roadside market. And the Ministry has been seen to respond to these requests which has helped it project a more positive image with the public. The Ministry is also able to properly inform local officials of the works completed on the roads and use of funds.

On the side of the MoWHC, the road staff have gained more local knowledge of the roads and developed good relations with the local authorities. In the national climate

of decentralisation and increased transparency, the MoWHC is able to be more accountable to the public through its activities with road committees and this has helped build a better relationship between the central ministry and the local government authorities.

The impact assessment workshops with the road committees enable the project to easily gain valuable information for evaluating the impact of the road improvements funded and carried out under the project. However, these workshops play an even more valuable role in making the sub-counties recognise the benefits that do accrue from the road improvement and the consequent need to see that the road is properly maintained and to work closely with the MoWHC to that effect. Not only that, the workshops provide a forum to analyse how the benefits gained are distributed. It is clearly evident that communities located away from the improved road and connected by poor or impassable access roads have benefited considerably less from the improved transport services, greater agricultural marketing and business opportunities and easier access to social services. This is posing a challenge to the local leadership at village, parish and sub-county level to devote greater effort and resources towards improving their own community access road network. Following the main gravel road improvements, a number of village communities have mobilised to improve their access to the main road and new markets have been established. Where labour-based road rehabilitation methods have been used, the local communities have been encouraged and are better equipped to maintain and improve their own community access road network.

6. ADOPTING THE ROAD COMMITTEE APPROACH MORE WIDELY

As the project piloted and spearheaded the road committee approach in Western Uganda during 1997 and 1998, the positive developments in improved relations between the MoWHC stations, local communities and contractors were very evident to those involved. The District Engineers started requesting the project to help establish road committees along other lengths of their networks that were not scheduled to be funded under the project.

During the second project implementation phase that started in 1999, the MoWHC stations took the lead in organising activities with road committees and the project provided financial support for workshop costs. With emphasis being placed on Government's need to be accountable to the public, and with the success of the pilot road committee activities, the MoWHC decided to adopt the road committee approach nationwide. The Minister of Works, Housing and Communications issued a directive to the Districts and to all MoWHC District Engineers to set up road committees at sub-county level to cover all national trunk and district roads. The principal tasks of the road committees are to monitor the road conditions, activities being executed by the road staff/contractors, ensure protection of roads and road furniture from damages by the public and report to the District Engineers on any shoddy work being executed.

Engineers and civil works staff are technically skilled personnel who are rarely trained in public relations work. To assist them to carry out activities with road committees, the project developed a training course on communications and facilitation skills together with specific guidelines on conducting workshops with road

committees. This training was aimed at enabling the MoWHC to develop a good, positive two-way relationship with the road committees, to maximise the sharing of knowledge and information. Two to three day courses were held for the MoWHC station staff in the project area and they had the added benefit of instilling greater confidence in all the staff in terms of making presentations and working together with their superiors. The courses equipped the stations to organise and carry out workshops and other activities. The day after the course, participants jointly organise and carry out a road committee workshop in a nearby sub-county. The project's Community Roads Officer monitored stations' action plans and subsequent activities and provided follow-up support as required. The stations report centrally to the MoWHC and to the project on activities undertaken with road committees. Now, the MoWHC is funding stations' road committee activities in terms of workshop costs, where they have been planned and proposed by stations.

Following the piloting of the communications and facilitation skills training courses in the project area, a further four courses were held in the different regions of the country with other MoWHC stations and an engineer from MoWHC headquarters has been made responsible for community participation activities of the Ministry. At the request of the Ministry, the project also made a presentation to other donors in the road sector to help support the introduction of the road committee approach. If the MoWHC stations throughout Uganda are to adopt and utilise the road committee approach, more training, support and resources will need to be provided. A training course in isolation is not sufficient. In May 2001, the project and the MoWHC will be holding a review of the Road Committee approach experience in western Uganda and thereafter, the MoWHC will decide and take forward the approach, particularly on the national trunk road network and in their stations.

The MoWHC directive of 1999 also stated that the sub-county road committees should also cover the district road network. To date, the local government District Engineers have not received training in establishing and working with road committees. Some districts have gone ahead to establish a number of road committees whilst others prefer to use the existing sub-county works committees. The District and Urban Roads (DUR) division within the MoWHC is interested to explore how community participation can best be effected on the district and community access road network to improve road maintenance on these networks. This will gain from the road committee experience on the national main roads. A study is scheduled for this year that will help guide the development of policy and training support for local governments and civil works staff responsible for district and community access roads.

7. CONCLUSION

Roadside communities and road users are very important stakeholders in the maintenance of the road network. They have a great deal of important local knowledge about their roads that can help the relevant authorities better provide and maintain the road network. If their knowledge of road maintenance issues is also increased, they can play a very helpful role to the authorities in the monitoring and maintenance of the roads. In Uganda, the Road Committee approach has so far proved an effective way of establishing collaboration and information sharing

between the Ministry charged with national road maintenance responsibilities and the local communities adjoining the roads as well as road contractors.

The approach piloted by the Western Uganda Road Maintenance Capacity Building Project has been adopted by the Ministry of Works, Housing and Communications and there are reasonable prospects for the approach to be utilised nationally and the experience to be of use on other categories of road in the country.

Some of the key factors behind the success of this model include the participatory approach of the project in involving major stakeholders throughout; using the existing institutional structures wherever possible; and using existing road maintenance procedures such as site visits. From the start, the project has tried to develop and pilot approaches that address the interests of the stakeholders involved and that are also cost-effective. The road committee approach was introduced at a time of Government emphasis on decentralisation, privatisation and accountability and the MoWHC saw the approach as a useful means of improving road maintenance management and of helping it to address these aspects on the national trunk road network. It is hoped that this example of increasing the sharing of knowledge between stakeholders in the road network can be useful to other countries and people engaged in the provision and upkeep of roads.